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ABSTRACT

The current wave of school reform focuses on restructuring schools to align all aspects of the school community around a consistent and guiding vision. While-school reform, or comprehensive school reform, has reached the forefront of educational reform, now that the research on effective schools shows that school communities with clear goals and objectives, leadership capable of maintaining a school vision, high expectations for students with an emphasis on academics, and parent and community involvement will raise the achievement of all students. (Author)

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Synthesis of the Research Conducted in the First Three Years of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program

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Synthesis of the Research Conducted in the First Three Years of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program

Kenneth Wong, Anna Nicotera, and JoAnn Manning

The current wave of school reform focuses on restructuring schools to align all aspects of the school community around a consistent and guiding vision. Whole-school reform, or comprehensive school reform, has reached the forefront of educational reform, now that the research on effective schools shows that school communities with clear goals and objectives, leadership capable of maintaining a school vision, high expectations for students with an emphasis on academics, and parent and community involvement will raise the achievement of all students (Keirstead & Beckstrom, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Along with this research, further research on high-poverty schools suggests that the effects of poverty on student achievement affect all students in high-poverty schools, not just the students targeted by traditional pull-out programs (Keirstead & Beckstrom, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Together, the research on effective schools and high-poverty schools facilitated a change in Title I funding from fragmented or categorical funding to schoolwide funding in 1988 with the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments to Chapter 1. With the shift to Title I schoolwide programs, services spread throughout the school. Without effective school structures in place, the effectiveness of the Title I funding became diluted and did not adequately meet the needs of disadvantaged students (Wong & Meyer, 1998). Faced with these problems, policymakers realized that Title I funds could not be effectively used without good school structures to support the schoolwide method of reform.

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program, which began in 1998, creates a financial incentive to induce schools to implement sound schoolwide structures. the CSRD program[1] gives funds to schools to implement a research-based whole-school model

[1] The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), eliminating the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program's characterization as a demonstration program.

that uses proven methods and innovative strategies to improve student performance. The models are not to be used as add-ons or manufactured and ready-to-use programs. Schools are to use the models for guidance and technical assistance in order to reach the goals of the school's particular reform vision.

In 2001, there were approximately 3,500 schools nationwide receiving CSRD program funds at a minimum of $50,000 per year for 3 years. In order to receive the initial funding, as well as continued funding for the second and third years, schools must devise a plan for collecting, evaluating, and using data from the reform effort to improve school activities and assess student performance. Many schools have just completed or are in their third and final year of funding.

As schools complete the 3 years of CSRD program funding, it is an opportune time to examine what has been learned about the CSRD program. This paper will discuss current research and ideas about the functioning of the CSRD program, as well as examine research on the whole-school reform effort, to provide an overview of the research findings. This paper will also address areas of the whole-school reform effort that require further analysis.

To gauge what is known about the CSRD program, the paper is organized into four sections:

- Design of the whole-school models
- The cost-effectiveness of the whole-school models
- The role of the district in implementing and sustaining the CSRD program
- Evidence of the effectiveness of the CSRD program on student performance

Design of the Whole-School Models

Research on the design of whole-school models has primarily consisted of studies of individual whole-school models conducted by or for the model developers and catalogs that describe and rate various whole-school models. The research on individual whole-school models provides implementation and student outcome data, but the data are not comparative. A

comparative analysis of the designs of the whole-school models would be a valuable tool for educators using CSRD program funds in choosing a model that most appropriately matches their school's reform vision. This paper will focus on the research from the catalogs, rather than the many individual studies, because the catalogs use the individual studies to describe and evaluate the whole-school models and currently make the best attempt at comparing the model designs (see Table 1).

The reports listed in Table 1 function primarily as catalogs, providing basic information about the most widely used whole-school model designs and serving as guides to help educators match models with their schools' particular needs. The reports individually review the models based on their design characteristics, provide lists of their conducted studies, and describe their potential implementation processes.

The American Institute for Research (AIR) report, *An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform* (Herman, Aladjem, McMahon, Masem, Mulligan, & O'Malley, 1999), differs from the other catalogs as the authors use the research findings from the individual studies to rate each whole-school model on effectiveness, support from developers, and the cost to implement the model. From an analysis of the research conducted on the individual models, the AIR authors found that only 3 of the 24 models included present strong evidence for improving academic performance. The authors do not present a comparative discussion of the models, but it may be possible to use the AIR ratings to make comparisons. Any comparison, though, is constrained by the fact that the models have not been evaluated using similar methodology. It must also be pointed out that the methodology the AIR report uses to analyze the ability of a model to improve academic achievement favors model designs that use specific and prescriptive directives for instructional change, rather than models using facilitative methods to change the organization of the school.

TABLE 1

Research Conducted on Whole-School Model Designs

Evaluative Report	Information and Characteristics of Model Design	Evaluates Empirical Data on Individual Models	Rates Effectiveness Based on Empirical Data	Compares Various Model Designs
Better by Design? (Traub, 1999)	X	X	X	
Building on the Best, Learning from What Works (AFT, 1998)	X	X		
An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform (AIR, 1999)	X	X	X	
What Do We Know: Widely Implemented School Improvement Programs (LSS, 1997)	X			X
Study of Instructional Improvement (CPRE, in progress, 2008)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Formative Evaluation Process for School Improvement (University of Memphis/AEL, forthcoming 2002)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Better by Design? A Consumer's Guide to Schoolwide Reform (Traub, 1999), and *Building on the Best, Learning from What Works: Six Promising Schoolwide Reform Programs* (American Federation of Teachers, 1998) present case studies of how the model designs function in schools across the nation. Traub, for example, describes the design of 10 models and gives the AIR ratings for each. He then writes about the characteristics of the school using each model and describes the school's experience with the model using qualitative data and anecdotes. Traub does not provide information about the outcomes of the models on academic achievement or compare the models, but the guide does offer school and district educators a snapshot of how the models work in different schools.

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) report, *What Do We Know: Widely Implemented School Improvement Programs* (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997), provides a detailed comparison of the designs of 12 widely used whole-school reform models. The LSS report defines models as either prescriptive and curricular or facilitative and focused on school governance. The report describes the goals and focus of the models, the program practices, and the requirements for implementation. The report does not evaluate the evidence of effectiveness of the models because the authors note that this evidence is lacking. The LSS report is a valuable tool for schools because it analyzes the design of the models and provides a comparison of the differing levels of involvement each model will require in a school.

Two forthcoming research projects plan to target the area of comparative analysis that the current work on whole-school model design has neglected. The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) is conducting a project entitled *Study of Instructional Improvement*. The project will study four whole-school models and focus on three areas: (1) how the models are designed and how they operate in the educational system, (2) the different types of instructional intervention the models produce, and (3) the types of changes in instruction that show promise for improving student learning. The project began in the 2000–2001 academic school year and will continue for 6 years.

The University of Memphis also has a project underway for evaluating the effectiveness of whole-school model design. The project, entitled *Formative Evaluation Process for School Improvement*, focuses on 13 model designs, including areas such as the implementation process, the models' impact on student performance, and the success of different models with different subgroups of at-risk students. The project covers the academic years from fall 1999 to spring 2002.

The catalogs of model designs have provided a valuable service to educators attempting to determine the difference between whole-school models. The challenge for researchers now is to move beyond individual studies of models based on the results of anomalous schools, which may not be replicated in or appropriate for schools in differing contexts. Research on the design of the whole-school models should now focus on comparing the results of various models. Comparative research can provide definitive evidence of how models impact student performance in diverse situations. The results of comparative research would be a valuable tool for educators attempting to determine the appropriate model for a particular school's reform vision.

The Cost-Effectiveness of the Whole-School Models

Few researchers have addressed the issue of the cost-effectiveness of the whole-school models or the implications of the costs (see Table 2). The catalogs of whole-school models described in the previous section report the overall cost to implement each model but do not itemize the cost into different expenditure categories, such as additional staff, professional development training, materials and technology, facility changes, or technical assistance. Based on a comparison of the overall costs presented in the AIR study, the prescriptive models that encourage curricular change are more expensive than the facilitative models that suggest a shift in school governance. With little comparative information about the effectiveness of the models on academic achievement, schools may be tempted to choose a model based on a lower overall cost rather than the model most appropriate for a school's particular needs.

TABLE 2

Research Conducted on the Cost-Effectiveness of Whole-School Models

Evaluative Report	Offers Information and Characteristics of Model Design	Presents Cost of Models	Demonstrates Cost-Effectiveness Related to Services	Demonstrates Cost-Effectiveness Related to Academic Achievement
An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform (AIR, 1999)	X	X		
Meeting the Educational Needs of At-Risk Students: A Cost Analysis of Three Models (King, 1994)	X	X	X	
Building on the Best, Learning from What Works (AFT, 1998)	X	X		
What Do We Know: Widely Implemented School Improvement Programs (LSS, 1997)	X		X	

Meeting the Educational Needs of At-Risk Students: A Cost Analysis of Three Models (King, 1994) examines the costs of three whole-school models on the continuum from prescriptive to facilitative. King recognizes the importance of comparing models to gain insight on the various approaches. King's cost analysis does not relate the cost of the models to their effectiveness on student achievement; rather, the study compares the cost of each model relative to the services necessary to implement the model effectively. King finds that models that are more specific and prescriptive are more costly in additional expenditures, such as instructional materials; whereas the facilitative models are more costly in additional time requirements for staff and faculty.

The LSS study, *What Do We Know: Widely Implemented School Improvement Programs* (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997), if used with knowledge of the overall cost of the models involved in the study, can provide educators with a better understanding of model cost in terms of the level of commitment necessary to implement the model effectively. This type of information is quite beneficial for schools receiving CSRD program funds. Schools in the CSRD program

receive a minimum of $50,000 per year, which is much less than the overall cost of many of the whole-school models. The LSS report breaks down the resources necessary for each of the whole-school models. Educators can use this information to determine how to reallocate resources already present in the school and combine those resources with CSRD funds to make the whole-school reform effort cost-effective.

Data are lacking on the cost-effectiveness of whole-school models in relation to the impact of the models on student performance. Research that correlates the cost of the models and the impact on academic achievement could be valuable for educators choosing appropriate models for their schools. Future research on model cost-effectiveness should also make an effort to compare various models.

The Role of the District in Implementing and Sustaining the CSRD Program

Research on the role of the district in the CSRD program focuses on how districts should help schools implement schoolwide visions for reform and the complementing whole-school model (see Table 3). The researchers make recommendations regarding the appropriate role of the district in the whole-school reform movement. Most of the reports evaluate the role that districts have played thus far in the process of implementation, remarking on either the success or failure of district actions. The reports that evaluate the district's role also attempt to make a correlation between particular district actions and the ability of schools to implement whole-school reform. None of the reports have directly connected the role of the district to improvements in student performance. Several reports claim, though, that if the district can make the environment conducive to whole-school reform, such a change will increase the capacity of schools to implement the reform effectively and support improvements in student performance (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Desimone, 2000; Wong & Sunderman, 2000). An environment conducive to whole-school reform necessitates a district policy with clear goals that provides strong, quality, and long-term support to schools. If a district takes on a reform effort such as whole-school

TABLE 3

Research Conducted on the Role of the District in the CSRD Program

Evaluative Report	Offers Recommendations for the Role of the District	Evaluates the Role of the District in the Level of Implementation	Relates the Role of the District to Academic Achievement
Contradictions and Control in Systemic Reform (Foley, 2001)	X	X	
Early Implementation of the CSRD Program (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2000)	X	X	
Effective Implementation of Title I Schoolwide Programs (Wang & Wong, 2001)	X		
Evaluation of Detroit's Comer Schools and Families Initiative (Millsap et al., 2000)	X	X	
Implementation in New American Schools (Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 2001)	X	X	
Implementing Districtwide Reform in Schools With Title I Schoolwide Programs (Wong & Sunderman, 2000)	X	X	
Implementing School Reform Models: The Clover Park Experience (Davis, Sagmiller, & Hagans, 1999)	X	X	
Making Comprehensive School Reform Work (Desimone, 2000)	X	X	
States and Districts and Comprehensive School Reform (CPRE, 1998)	X		
Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: The Case of the Washington, DC Schools (Wang & Manning, 2000)	X	X	
Working Together for Reliable School Reform (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000)	X	X	

reform, the district must actively inform schools about the reform and make certain that there will be continuous district support to maintain the level of involvement necessary to effectively implement and sustain the reform.

The reports that study the role of the district in CSRD implementation present a series of recommendations for the district's appropriate role based on observations of what actions will be most effective in helping schools implement and sustain whole-school reform (see Tables 4 & 5). The recommendations vary, depending largely on how the districts in the studies decide to operate their whole-school reform efforts. Several districts forced whole-school reform on low-performing schools (Foley, 2001; Wang & Manning, 2000). When the reform is district initiated and mandated, the district has to play a more active role to assist the schools in understanding and accepting the reform process. Other districts have limited which whole-school models the schools can choose to implement (Foley, 2001; Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 2001; Millsap, Chase, Obeidallah, Perez-Smith, Brigham, & Johnston, 2000; Wang & Manning, 2000). These districts limit the availability of whole-school models to align the reform effort to a particular district vision. According to the U.S. Department of Education Report *Early Implementation of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program*, which reviews the actions of districts from around the country, most districts encourage schools to voluntarily participate in whole-school reform and freely choose an approved whole-school model (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This report further recommends that districts assist schools by (a) helping to match school needs with model designs, (b) finding additional time and resources for school reform, (c) aligning school and district strategies and standards, (d) developing ownership of the reform, (e) cultivating leadership, and (f) acting as a facilitator between the schools and the model developers.

TABLE 4

Recommendations for the Role of the District in the CSRD Program

Recommendations	*Contradictions and Control in Systemic Reform* (Foley, 2001)	*Early Implementation of the CSRD Program* (U.S. Department of Education, 2000)	*Effective Implementation of Title I Schoolwide Programs* (Wang & Wang, 2001)	*Evaluation of Detroit's Comer Schools and Families Initiative* (Millsap et al., 2000)	*Implementation in New American Schools* (Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 2001)	*Making Comprehensive School Reform Work* (Desimone, 2000)
Create a districtwide environment conducive to reform effort		X		X	X	X
Act to build the capacity of schools for reform	X	X				X
Establish stability with long-term support and clear goals				X	X	X
Create a culture of trust						X
Provide accurate and quality information on designs	X	X	X		X	X
Reallocate resources to complement reform effort		X	X		X	X
Set standards and expectations	X					X
Create an accountability mechanism	X		X		X	X
Ensure that district personnel are knowledgeable about the models						X
Provide assistance for assessment and planning process		X		X		X
Help to develop ownership for reform						X
Allow for school flexibility (budget, hiring, curriculum, and instruction)					X	X
Encourage parent and community participation		X	X			
Cultivate leadership skills for principals		X				
Assist in creating benchmark goals		X				X
Assist in aligning and integrating standards with benchmark goals		X	X			X
Provide necessary professional development		X	X		X	X
Act as liaison between schools and model design		X				X
Establish a network of schools for collaboration		X				X
Monitor and evaluate progress of reform effort	X	X	X		X	
Help to institutionalize reform for sustainability		X				

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TABLE 4 (cont'd.)
Recommendations for the Role of the District in the CSRD Program

Recommendations	*Implementing Districtwide Reform in Schools With Title I Schoolwide Programs* (Wong & Sunderman, 2000)	*Implementing School Reform Models: The Clover Park Experience* (Davis, Sagmiller, & Hagans, 1999)	*States and Districts and Comprehensive School Reform* (CPRE, 1998)	*Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: The Case of the Washington, DC Schools* (Wang & Manning, 2000)	*Working Together for Reliable School Reform* (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000)
Create a districtwide environment conducive to reform effort	X	X	X	X	X
Act to build the capacity of schools for reform	X	X	X	X	
Establish stability with long-term support and clear goals		X		X	X
Create a culture of trust					
Provide accurate and quality information on designs		X	X		X
Reallocate resources to complement reform effort		X	X		
Set standards and expectations				X	
Create an accountability mechanism			X		
Ensure that district personnel are knowledgeable about the models		X			
Provide assistance for assessment and planning process		X	X		
Help to develop ownership for reform				X	
Allow for school flexibility (budget, hiring, curriculum, and instruction)	X	X	X		X
Encourage parent and community participation		X	X		
Cultivate leadership skills for principals		X			
Assist in creating benchmark goals					
Assist in aligning and integrating standards with benchmark goals					
Provide necessary professional development		X	X		
Act as liaison between schools and model design			X		
Establish a network of schools for collaboration	X				
Monitor and evaluate progress of reform effort		X	X		
Help to institutionalize reform for sustainability					X

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TABLE 5

Research Conducted on the Effects of the CSRD Program on Student Performance

Evaluative Report	Shows Evidence of Level of Implementation	Demonstrates Impact on Student Performance	Demonstrates Impact on Teacher Practice	Demonstrates Impact on the School Environment
An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform (AIR, 1999)		X		
Early Implementation of the CSRD Program (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2000)		X		
Making Comprehensive School Reform Work (Desimone, 2000)	X	X		
Status Report on the SERVE Implementation Study in CSRD Schools, 1999–2000 (SERVE, 2000)	X		X	X
Working Together for Reliable School Reform (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000)	X	X		
New American Schools (RAND, forthcoming 2001)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Longitudinal Research on Whole-School Improvement Through CSRD and Other Reform Efforts (Johns Hopkins University, forthcoming 2004)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

The reports agree that the appropriate role of the district in CSRD implementation is to create an environment conducive to whole-school reform that will improve school capacity to implement the reform effort effectively. The reports present a list of recommendations such as those above regarding the role of the district as capacity builder. Further research should attempt to correlate the various district actions with the implementation process and improvements in academic achievement.

Evidence of the Effectiveness of the CSRD Program on Student Performance

Currently, there are few studies that have the necessary empirical data on the CSRD program to determine the program's impact on student performance (see Table 5). Research on whole-school reform is limited to studies of individual model designs that have not followed rigorous or similar evaluation methodologies (Desimone, 2000). The AIR report, *An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform* (Herman et al., 1999), analyzes the individual model design studies

and rates the evidence of effectiveness of the models as strong, promising, marginal, or weak. Overall, the AIR findings show that 50% of the models that focus on curriculum, 60% of the models that focus on instruction, and 40% of the models that focus on governance rate strong or promising for improving student performance. The AIR report is the most comprehensive study to date that attempts to provide information on the effectiveness of various model designs.

Early Implementation of the CSRD Program (U.S. Department of Education, 2000) presents qualitative evidence that the CSRD program produces a positive impact on student performance across the country. Further quantitative data are needed to support these claims, and the U.S. Department of Education has required schools to develop and maintain evaluations of the progress of the CSRD program for the 3 years of funding. As many schools have completed this funding cycle, this data should become available for analysis. It should also be noted that evaluations of the impact of the CSRD program would benefit from longitudinal data continuing past the initial 3 years of funding. Two forthcoming reports, from RAND and Johns Hopkins University, promise to be longitudinal and compare various model designs as they relate to student performance.

One element that may assist evaluations of the impact of whole-school reform on student performance is the determination of the level of implementation. Several researchers have used the level of implementation of the model designs to predict the impact on student performance (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Desimone, 2000), and such studies, like that highlighted below, may lead to conclusions about this impact. Of course, academic gains resulting from a school's fidelity to a model assumes that the school has chosen the appropriate model for its needs. The issue of model fidelity does not mean that a school should implement an arbitrary model perfectly to produce academic results. A school can generate improvements in student performance by adequately implementing the methods of school reform that are appropriate to the school's needs.

The SERVE report, *Status Report on the SERVE Implementation Study in CSRD Schools, 1999–2000* (SERVE, 2000), provides only a snapshot of the ongoing work of SERVE's study on

implementation. The status report nevertheless highlights an important concept that should be acknowledged in evaluations of the impact of whole-school reform on student performance: analysis of student performance outcomes should not be limited to standardized test results. Most standardized tests are not able to assess the changes in a school brought about by whole-school reform, such as teacher collaboration, student critical thinking skills, and alternative instructional practices (Desimone, 2000). The status report claims that SERVE is not only assessing academic achievement but also changes in the school environment, teacher performance, and student behavior. The current results show that schools using CSRD program funds have made positive improvements in all of these categories.

Studying the impact of the CSRD program on student performance is an area in need of further research. Continuous and informative evaluations should be used in every school and district to assess the progress and results of the reform effort. Although the evaluations will likely be used for political purposes, they should be used as an internal monitoring mechanism for schools to make adjustments and improvements to increase the effectiveness of the reform effort on student performance.

Conclusion

The current research on the CSRD program highlights the need for additional research in several areas: the design and cost-effectiveness of whole-school models, the role of the district in implementing and sustaining the CSRD program, and evidence of the effectiveness of the CSRD program on student performance. Future research on whole-school model design must make comparisons among the different models and provide evidence of the impact of implementation on student performance. Regarding cost-effectiveness, some research has been conducted on the relationship between model cost and the services provided to the school, but very little is known about the relationship between cost and the impact of model implementation on student performance. The research on the role of the district in CSRD implementation has used empirical evidence to make recommendations regarding district assistance to schools during the

implementation process. Further research on the district's role should focus on the effectiveness of the actions districts take, such as mandating particular models. Research on the effect of the CSRD program on student performance is the most limited, yet the area is the most vital to assessing CSRD for adjustments. Researchers must make use of the data available, particularly from schools that have completed 3 years of funding, keeping in mind that the most useful data for educators will be longitudinal and comparative in nature.

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